

Elly French

2nd Place

Lake Washington Girls Middle School

Age 13

Grade 8

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Barack Obama, February 2008

Dear Dr. Martin Luther King,

In April of 1963, you said in one of your letters from the Birmingham Jailhouse that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." It is forty-seven years later and today justice continues to be denied. The injustice of racism continues today despite your vision of racial equality so long ago. I have grown up as a white girl in the United States for the past thirteen years and I have heard and seen prejudice against people of color. The problem of racism in the United States has not been fully resolved, but "we are the ones we've been waiting for," and as President Obama had said, "we are the change that we seek." While there is work to be done, I have hope that progress will continue to be made, because I know from my own experience what that change feels like.

Reading and understanding the words in your letters from Birmingham opened my eyes to something larger than what I had already comprehended about racism. In your words you explained the inequality and injustice of how you were treated. It's been a while since you wrote those words, and little by little we have made progress in fulfilling your dream of getting along with one another. But the saying "we are the ones we've have been waiting for" suggests that we have been waiting and that there is still more work to be done.

I attend Lake Washington Girls Middle School in Seattle's Central District. It is a small, close-knit, and diverse school where we are taught to get along and be inclusive of everyone, and there are people of every type. Unlike my previous school, it's comforting

to see that everyone belongs. My brother attended a larger public middle school in the same neighborhood and it is also diverse. Unlike me, he experienced the feeling that people have less in common than what I have experienced in my school. My three years at Lake Washington Girls Middle School have let me see how a community of diverse people can come together as one family. At my school we *are* the change that we seek. I have each one of my classmates inside of me and I have come to understand their feelings and their struggles. Unlike in many other places, we do not judge people from the outside, but instead we understand them from the inside. Learning in the environment of my school, I have come to appreciate each and every one of the girls like they are my sisters.

In your letters you emphasize the injustice of racism and describe how African Americans were treated unfairly. While we have made progress, there is still work to be done about the racial inequality and I feel that if we want change then we must be the ones to reinforce it.

I have overheard my brother and his friends talking and laughing about racist jokes that my brother's friends have repeated. I don't think my brother is a racist, and he has lots of different kinds of friends, but telling jokes is one way that he and his friends get along. When I overheard them on this day, I mentioned how racist they were being and that even though only they could hear it, it was still wrong to say. They accused me of being "a goody goody," and assured me that nobody would hear it so it didn't matter. People are going to have their own opinion on things and others are going to believe differently. Being "the ones we've been waiting for" means calling out racism when we see it and understanding the meaning of our words.

I don't know as much as I would like to say I do, but having gone to my school, I can say that I have a better understanding than many people about the racial inequality of our country. I now understand your motive to try and change this country and you made more of a difference in a couple of years than the rest of us have in forty. You started this chain reaction throughout the United States that has provoked us to finish your dream and go to the very end of this long drawn out process. Your "I have a Dream Speech" opened up people of every kind to a dream that should be bigger than yours and now that I have realized this, I hope that others will too. I would like kids to get the same diverse education that I have had throughout my middle school years, so that in the future they can understand that we are more alike than we are different. That is what it means to be "the ones we've been waiting for."

Sincerely,

Someone who believes in your dream

Bibliography

Washington, James Melvin, Ed. A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. San Francisco: Harper Collins. 1986

"Martin Luther King - Biography". Nobelprize.org. 24 Nov 2010

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html